Luis Muñoz, the seventeenth-century hagiographer, dedicates the second book of his *Vida* of Juan de Ávila to showcase the careers of his most eminent disciples.¹ He listed over twenty-eight religious men, including Fray Luis de Granada, who demonstrated through their lives the holiness of their teacher and mentor. While Muñoz included some of Ávila’s women disciples, he clearly highlighted their male counterparts as the worthy successors of the Apostle of Andalusia. To this day scholars continue writing about the “priestly school of Ávila,” in an ambiguous reference to the reform movement(s) centered on the city of Ávila, and/or the man bearing the same name. In either case, the “priestly school” has been exclusively conceived around its masculine religious exponents. Bilinkof has ably argued the continuity between Juan de Ávila’s reform program and that of the reformer of the Discalced Carmelites, Teresa de Jesús. In fact, he gathered around him numerous women who experienced dramatic, and even fateful, changes as a consequence of his teachings and ascetic discipline. These women formed part of a distinctively *Avilista* school of holy women. Without them our understanding of Ávila and his movement of spiritual renewal remains thoroughly incomplete.

Fortunately, it is still possible for us to group together some of Ávila’s closest women disciples and identify the modalities of religious life that they followed. In the *Vidas* authored by Granada and Muñoz, as well as in other sources, we find references to at least thirteen women who were Ávila’s disciples. These devout followers of the saint were: Constanza de Ávila, Sancha Carrillo, Leonor de Córdoba, María de Cristo, Teresa Enríquez, María de Hoces, Leonor de Inestrosa, Francisca de Mendoza, María de Mendoza, Isabel Pacheco (Isabel de los Ángeles Pacheco), María Pacheco, Beata Paz, and Ana Ponce de León (Ana de la Cruz). Ávila also sustained frequent correspondence with many other women

¹ Luis Muñoz, *Vida y virtudes del venerable varón el padre maestro Juan de Ávila* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1635); reference is here made to the edition found in *Vidas* (1964), pp. 283–400.
whose identities are now lost. In addition, in 1623 the Congregation of San Pedro Apóstol gathered information that illustrates the enduring devotion that many religious women in Granada and Montilla still had for the saint.\(^2\)

The realization of Ávila’s appeal among noble Andalusian women helps us place his 1556 *Audi, filia* in the right perspective. The work was composed as a manual or handbook for religious women. It was originally written for Sancha Carrillo, but after her untimely death Ávila continued improving the work and gave it its final character as a women’s handbook for the spiritual life. Juan de Ávila drew upon the medieval tradition of the *Speculum virginum* in his effort to craft a spiritual handbook that would lead his women disciples through the discipline of self-knowledge. Hence, even if the work was published without his authorization it has to be given due priority over the second edition which appeared in print posthumously.

*Of Beatas and Religiosas: Women Disciples of Juan de Ávila*

Many of Ávila’s women disciples came from a noble background; a few came from some of the most prestigious families in Spain. For instance, Sancha Carrillo (c. 1513–1537), one of his best-known disciples, was the daughter of Luis Fernández de Córdoba and Luisa de Aguilar Hinestrosa, marquises of Guadalcázar. According to her brother, Pedro Fernández de Córdoba, she became a hermit when she was around fifteen or sixteen years old. Before her conversion, however, she had been hand-picked to be one of the companions of Empress Isabel, at the court of Charles V.\(^3\) Ana Ponce de León (1527–1601) married Pedro Fernández de Córdoba y Figueroa, fourth count of Feria.\(^4\) Her husband came from the powerful house of Aguilar, and his mother, Catalina Fernández de Córdoba y Aguilar was marchioness of the ancestral family. Ana’s father was Rodrigo Ponce de León, duke of Arcos. María Mendoza (c. 1526–1580), took

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\(^3\) Pedro Fernández de Córdoba, *Vida de doña Sancha Carrillo, hija de don Luis Carrillo de Córdoba y de doña Luisa de Aguilar... Cosas que le pasaron a doña Sancha con nuestro Señor en el discurso de su vida y sobre cómo comenzó a servirle*, in *Avisos y reglas* (1963), pp. 281–305, here p. 288.